1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

776 778 considered sacred, and it is not permitted to cut it down. A woman in her periods is not allowed to go near the platform as cobra-deities are considered to be specially sensitive to defilement. If this rule is not respected, she, and probably the *okka* of which she is a member, will suffer misfortune. The cobra is a sacred creature and he who kills it will suffer from a skin disease like leucoderma.

243 778 There is an attitude of ritual respect towards the ancestral rice-field. This is specially noticeable when the crop is standing: a man may not wear sandals while walking through it, or hold an umbrella over his head, or whistle.

The rice-field is divided into a number of ridged-up plots and the central plot of the rice-field is regarded as particularly sacred. [846] Formerly it was the custom to bury the umbilical cord of the eldest son in the central plot. A man is supposed to have a special affinity to the place where his umbilical cord is buried. If a Coorg boy is found going to a particular place frequently, his elders twit him, [871] 'Is your umbilical cord buried there?' Nowadays the umbilical cord is buried in the yard of the palace of Mercara, or in a school-compound, because Coorgs want their sons to do well in examinations and become high government officials.

764 778 A part of the ancestral estate is used for burying or cremating the dead members of the *okka*. The part where corpses are buried is called *kēkaḷa* while the adjoining part used for cremation is called *tūṭangaḷa*.[1] It is sacred, but in an undesirable way: the term 'bad-sacred' has been used to denote such a ritual condition. (Bad-sacredness includes within itself both 'defilement and 'inauspiciousness'.) A visit to the burial-ground defiles a person and a bath [783] is necessary to restore him to normal ritual status.

764 775 The burial-ground for children may be near the house, whereas that for adults must be as far away as possible. The ghosts of adults [858] are harmful, while children's ghosts are comparatively harmless. An adult has a social personality, whereas a child does not have one. An adult occupies a social role or several social roles. The ghost of a headman or hero or a particularly evil man is more powerful than [765] that of an ordinary man. The mourning-period also varies according to age and social importance of the deceased.

[1] Amongst Coorgs, the corpses of elders and important people are cremated, [564] while the corpses of children and unimportant people are buried. The Brahmins, however, cremate all dead persons except infants, and in many parts of south India castes which want to rise in status give up burial for cremation.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

and failure to do so renders her suspect. It is fairly easy for a widow to secure a husband, while there is great reluctance to marrying a divorcée. Again, a widow is permitted to marry after a minimum period of six months have elapsed after the death of her husband, while a divorcée may remarry only after a year has elapsed since the granting of divorce. A widow is entitled to visit her children in their father's house, whereas a divorcée is not entitled to do so. Finally, a widow who has returned to her natal *okka* may marry again into her late husband's *okka*, whereas the doors of the former husband's *okka* are for ever shut to the divorcée.[1]

But the divorcée and widow are alike in this, that neither has a husband, and a woman, normally speaking, should not be without a husband. An unattached woman is a threat to the stability of existing social relations and to the moral code of the community. The widow and divorcée are both regarded with a certain amount of suspicion.

VIII

The children of an ordinary marriage are members of their father's *okka*. The fact of birth confers this all-important right on them and no special ceremony conferring membership is necessary. In *okka parijé* and *makka parijé* unions, however, the children belong to the natal *okka* of their mother, and this is only natural as the object of such alliances is the continuation of the mother's natal *okka*, threatened with extinction for lack of an agnatic male descendant.

The important fact is that the children of a sanctioned union are members of an *okka*, either their father's or mother's, and such membership they acquire by reason of birth. But the children of an unsanctioned union do not have membership in any *okka*, and they have to be given membership in either their father's or mother's *okka* some time subsequent to their birth.

In those rare cases where the existence of very special reasons lead to the children of a widow or divorcée being permitted to be transferred to their mother's *okka* from their father's *okka*, the unanimous consent of the members of both the concerned *okkas* is regarded as essential. After the widow or divorcée has been ritually

[1] A Coorg saw says that one may marry a widow but not a divorcée: *ketta ponnana bévalu, butta ponnana bévakéga.*

[P. 45]

CHAPTER VIII

COORG (Contd.)

IN the absence of a male issue in a house, a daughter is retained and married to a Coorg on condition that the children born are considered as the children of the wife's, and not of the husband's house. Such a husband may have another wife with children in his own house, and these have no share in the property of the other wife. Polygamy is not forbidden, but is seldom practised 858 857 595

It is worthy of note that the Coorgs have no priest to preside over the wedding ceremony. There are no religious functions such as those prevailing among the higher Hindu castes. There are some magical acts, which are related here. The bride's hand is grasped in order that she may be delivered into the hands of her husband. She eats with him on the wedding day to create community of life. Marriage ceremonies in all stages of culture are intended to neutralise the dangers and to make the union safe, prosperous and happy. It referred to the permanent joint life of man and woman, and the essence of the union is the joining together of the bridal pair. The practice of throwing rice may have originated in the idea of giving food to the evil influences to induce them to be propitious and to depart It is considered as a token of blessing. In many cases, it seems to have developed into a sympathetic mode of fertility. At one stage of the wedding, the bride veiled approaches the husband, and they see each other. These ideas may explain the origin of the bridal veil. Besides there is sexual shyness, and the ideas associated with women that these are dangerous as well as improper, and so they lead to effeminacy. Accordingly, the bride spends the wedding days with her girl friends and the bridegroom with young men who in the marriage institution are respectively called bridesmaids and groomsmen. 585 [793]

Polyandry

It has been observed that, in warlike races, the clannish feeling and family spirit often predominate over and absorb individual consciousness and personal rights. Among the Coorgs, family property descends not from father to son, as from generation to generation the eldest member acts as the head of the house. In olden times, the Coorgs are said to have lived in a state of general warfare, chief against chief, and Nadu against Nadu. As a relic of that age, the deep trenches which to this day are found intersecting the country in all directions may be considered. In such an age, destruction of life must have been great. But it was of course the male community that principally suffered in the turmoil. The people must soon 174 726 595 [428]

hold duties for 60 days to recover her normal health, and devote herself to her baby. During this period she daily bathes in hot water after having been well rubbed with castor oil before a charcoal fire. The robust health of a Coorg woman is no doubt due to the care taken by them during pregnancy and confinement.

Naming Ceremony

As soon as a Coorg boy is born, a little bow of a castor oil plant stick with an arrow made of a leaf stalk of the same plant is put into his little hands and a gun is fired in the courtyard. He is thus at taking his first breath introduced into the world as a future hunter and warrior. This ceremony is not generally now observed. On the twelfth day after birth, the child is laid into a cradle by the mother or grandmother who gives the name, which in many instances is well sounding and significant. Boys are known by Belliappah, Ponnappa, Mandanna and girls Puvakka, Muthakka and Chinnamma. The Coorg women are very prolific and bear children to the extent of ten or twelve. In cases of necessity a wet-nurse is engaged, but infanticide is not practised.

Family

The Coorg family is of the patriarchal type. It is the domicile of all male relatives and their children belonging to one parental stock. Two or three generations, grandfather, grandmother, their sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and other children numbering from 20 to 60 or even more in some cases, all live and mess together. The labourers who were once their slaves belong to the family and depend on their mistress for food and orders. So long as there is peace and harmony, a Coorg family is a fine example of the patriarchal type. Every domestic affair of importance can be undertaken only with the consent of the senior member. He is expected to look after the principal needs of the family and its members individually and check irregularities of all kinds by sound discipline. The nature and extent of his control may be gathered from the fact that married sons and their wives choose their residence under the paternal roof to avoid the responsibility of a separate establishment. The senior female member is the queen of the household, and holds a corresponding position among the junior members and their wives and daughters. The peace and harmony of the family that once prevailed may be marred by discord, by the harsh treatment of an imperious mother-in-law, by the jealousy and heart-burnings of the married members of the material questions affecting the family income and individual claims. The senior member who is the Karnavan of the family has no easy position under such circumstances. The domestic life under normal circumstances is brightened by the affection of the children for their parents and relatives, and the little ones, of whom there is generally a good number, are in turn great pets of the family. The bearing of the young in the presence of the old is decorous, but the grown-up members are not

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

574 upon as a great honour and on festive occasions they are frequently invited. Then great efforts are made to do honour to their guest, and in the more civilized houses a breakfast in almost English fashion is served on crockery and with knives and forks. But perhaps those receptions are more enjoyable where one comes unexpectedly and has to put up with little inconveniences which draw forth from the kind host all the greater concern for the comfort of his guest. At the unexpected arrival of a European visitor there is at once a great commotion amongst the fair Codagitis. Clean dresses are donned, ornaments put on and there is a running to and fro within the house. Soon the crackling of fire is heard and the aroma of roasted coffee indicates the coming treat. The coffee is brought in a spouted brass vessel or in a tumbler; it is highly sweetened, has also a bytaste of red pepper, as the coffee beans were broken in the mortar that serves for pounding spices, but you cannot resist to gratify the importunity of your kind host. To leave a Coorg house without having partaken of any offered refreshment, be it only a sip of milk or an orange, would be a grave offence against Coorg etiquette.

[272] [415] [252] [576]

515 It has been said that "the Coorg women do not exercise the domestic virtue of cleanliness." Considering the nature of the work that falls to their share, it cannot be expected, that they should always appear in festive costume; but they bathe frequently and whenever they are seen in public the women are remarkable for their clean and tidy appearance.

858 Coorg children show much affection for their parents and relations, and the little ones of whom there is generally a goodly number are great pets of the house. The visiting stranger is the object of their wonder, and if he succeeds to gain their confidence, he will be liked all the better by the whole family.

[574]

888 The bearing of the young in the presence of the old is decorous, the latter being greeted by every junior member of

576